

**SOUTH PASADENA LOCAL HISTORY
SOUTH PASADENA PUBLIC LIBRARY MATERIALS
SUBJECT: PHARMACIES**

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SOUTH PASADENA PHARMACIES

History of the Neighborhood Drug Stores

BY FLETCHER H. SWAN

For nearly one hundred years, there have been two drug stores at the corner of Fair Oaks Avenue and Mission Street in South Pasadena. One of those stores, the Raymond Pharmacy, opened in 1915 when the city's population was about 5,000, and it occupied the newly constructed Ozmun building on the northwest corner. Over the years, owners changed as did the name of the business. In 1930 it was known as Gaskill's Raymond Pharmacy. Ed Gaskill owned the business for many years and it wasn't until 1950 that new owners changed the name to the present Fair Oaks Pharmacy.

During the 1920s and 1930s, the store featured a soda fountain where soft drinks, milk shakes, ice cream and light lunches were available for purchase. There was also a Pacific Electric Railway ticket office where one could obtain tickets for destinations around Southern California served by the "Big Red Cars." Also available at the store were drugs, toiletries, perfumes and other sundries, in addition to the major metropolitan newspapers of the day. By maintaining the original soda fountain, the wood shelving, and the ornate showcases, the store's current owners have done a remarkable job in preserving the charm of a by-gone era.

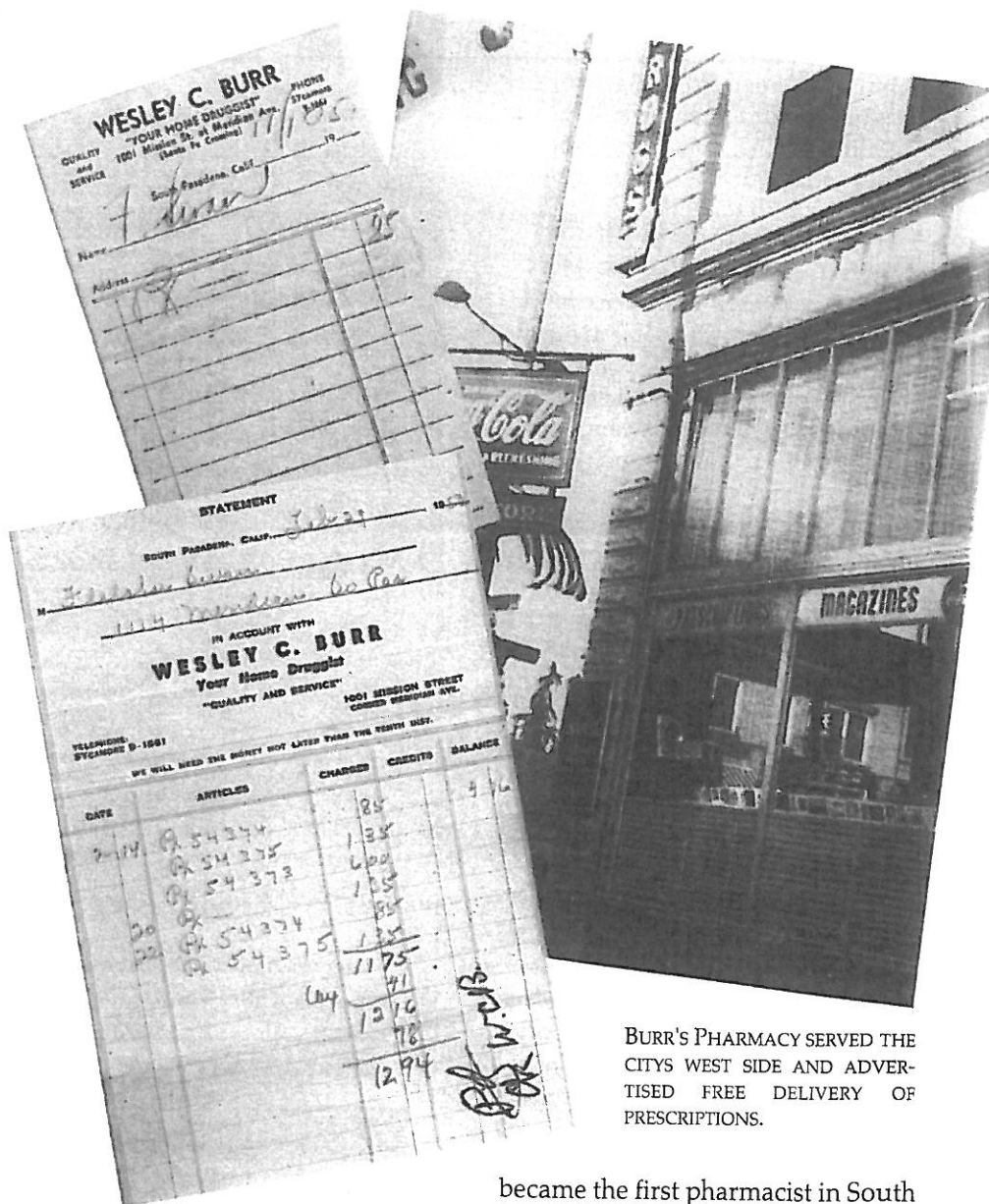
On the southeast corner of Fair Oaks and Mission Street was one of two buildings owned by the Ong family. The store at this location was Towne's Cut Rate Drugs and it was the largest drug store in the city in the mid-1930s. In addition to being a full-service drug store, it had a coffee shop where one could have a full breakfast for 25 cents, or dinner for 35 cents. Records are unclear, but it appears that Thrifty Drug Stores purchased the business in 1952 and continued there until the buildings on that block were razed in 1981 to make way for the buildings and

parking lot that currently occupy the property.

These were not the first drug stores in South Pasadena, however. During the late 1800s and early 1900s, new businesses jockeyed for prime locations in the growing city. Most of the activity centered in the Mission Street and Meridian Avenue area as the city's first bank, post office, city offices and the Santa Fe Railway depot were nearby. Historical records are vague, but it is believed that Bertram M. Weaver

became the first pharmacist in South Pasadena in 1890, shortly after the city's incorporation. He was associated with the Lederer Drug Co. at 1022 Mission Street between Diamond and Fairview Avenues. A few years later, in 1908, the store moved to the newly completed Alexander Building at 1001 Mission Street at the corner of Meridian Avenue. In 1910 it became the Wolfe Drug Company, and in 1913 it became Weaver's Pharmacy.

During the Great Depression of the late 1920s and early 1930s, the city of South Pasadena continued to



BURR'S PHARMACY SERVED THE CITY'S WEST SIDE AND ADVERTISED FREE DELIVERY OF PRESCRIPTIONS.

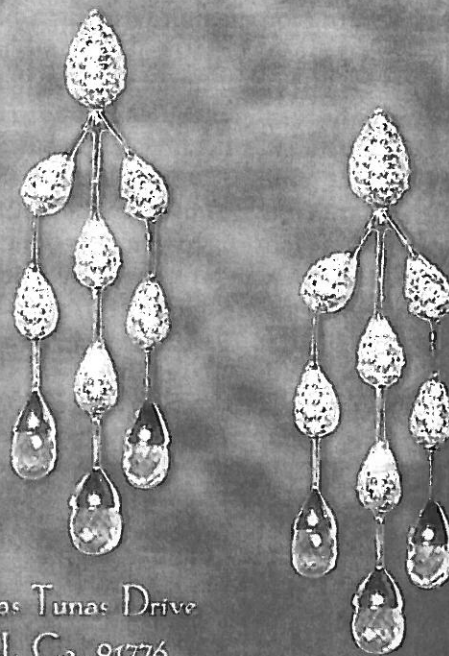
grow and prosper. By 1934, there were eight drug stores conveniently located throughout the community. Located on Huntington Drive was the Oneonta Drug Store, Burrhus Pharmacy and Beckley's Pharmacy (later Pools Pharmacy). On Mission Street was Gaskill's Raymond Pharmacy (later Fair Oaks Pharmacy), Weaver's Drug Store (later became Burr's Drug), and the Mission Cut Rate Drug Store (later Reger's Pharmacy). Fair Oaks Avenue became the home of the Patterson Drug Store (later Towne's Drug Store) and Brownfield Drug Store (later Monterey Pharmacy). As owners changed, so did the names of the businesses.

At various times, the Thrifty drug store chain operated three stores in South Pasadena. In addition to the store at Fair Oaks Avenue and Mission Street (now occupied by Rite-Aid), another was located on the 1400 block of Huntington Drive during the 1940s. In January 1963, an "ultramodern" store opened at 448 Fair Oaks Avenue in the Raymond Hill shopping center at State Street, where Orchard Supply Hardware is located today.

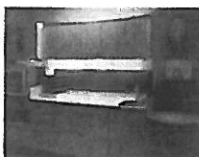
In addition to pharmaceuticals, the typical corner drug store offered perfume, greeting cards, film and photo finishing, ice cream, clocks, candy, cigars and tobacco products, magazines, newspapers and a host of other items, plus a lot of friendly advice from the pharmacist. In those days, the store owner or clerk would cheerfully locate the requested item and remove it from the cabinet or shelf for the customer. Self-service was not yet known. During the era of the neighborhood drug store, the pharmacist was usually the store's owner. The store was closed on Sunday, but he would usually spend part of the day washing windows, cleaning and polishing the floors, and other chores that could not be handled on a normal work day. Charge accounts were urged and welcomed. This was long before the days of computers and credit cards, so each sales slip was hand-written and hand-posted to the customer's ledger card, and then a monthly statement was generated by hand-- a

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lot of work, but a necessity.

The majority of drug stores during that era were equipped with a soda fountain, where customers could sit and enjoy a chocolate soda or milk shake, a soft drink, a dish of ice cream or a cone while waiting for a prescription to be filled. My favorite drug store and the one with which I was most familiar, was Weaver's Drug Store, located at the corner of Mission Street and Meridian Avenue at the Santa Fe Railway crossing. I was maybe ten years of age at the time, but Bertram "Bert" Weaver always impressed me as being a good businessman always nattily dressed in a business suit and greeting his customers by name. He

and his wife, Stella, lived on Fremont Avenue just a few blocks from the store. He did not drive, but she did, and it was not common in those days for a woman to drive. I recall seeing her stop in front of the store, driving what I believe was a 1929 Graham-Paige. He would climb into the rear seat and away they would go. They were an interesting couple.

In 1935, after 45 years in the drug business, he retired and sold the store to his long time pharmacist Wesley C. Burr. It was an easy transition of ownership, as Burr had worked for Weaver for 16 years. "Wes" Burr was short in stature but big in personality. He and his wife,

Maude, lived at 701 Meridian Avenue just a block from the store. In fact, the store could be seen from their front porch. Their daughter, Helen, attended South Pasadena High School and later became a teacher there. He was active in community affairs as a mason and a longtime member of the Oneonta Club. Burr's Pharmacy served the city's west side and advertised free delivery of prescriptions. There was a small soda fountain at the front of the store and after school and on Saturdays I would occasionally work at the soda fountain or make deliveries on my bicycle.

When the municipal plunge at Orange Grove opened in 1939, Burr's was the place for youngsters to stop on their way home, still dripping wet, for an ice cream cone, soft drink, a nickel candy bar or some penny candy. Although there were three cash registers at various locations in the store, many times he made change to customers from the coins in his pocket. In those days the various drug stores in the city worked closely with one another in loaning or exchanging merchandise, so many a bike trip I made between Burr's and Pool's pharmacy on Huntington Drive.

At the far rear of the store, was a stairway which led to a basement where surplus goods and records were located. When starting down the stairs, stepping on the third step would turn the basement lights on, and on the way back up would turn the lights off. A pretty handy feature if your hands were full of stock. A colorful figure, Burr amused his neighbors and stayed fit at the same time by walking backwards along the long block between Mission and Magnolia Streets. He retired in 1955 after thirty-six years as a pharmacist. He passed away in 1977 at the age, of 97.

Following Burr's retirement in 1955, the business was acquired by Paul J. Silvio, a registered pharmacist and a South Pasadena resident. He had been associated with other local pharmacies and was well-known in the community. Burr worked for Silvio for a period of time and some of the Burr traditions

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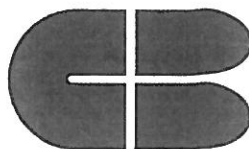
continued, such as a 5 cent refund on each empty prescription bottle that was returned for a refill. Mr. Silvio's wife, Vernelle, worked at the store on a daily basis. Their children, Colin and Susan, assisted their parents after school and on weekends.

Mr. Silvio acquired the prescription files of Reger's Pharmacy when it closed, which was a common practice among pharmacies in those days.

In 1969, he passed away due to illness and Pool's Pharmacy acquired the business. One year later, after 80 years in business, Burr's Pharmacy closed.

Another very popular neighborhood drug store at the time was Pool's Pharmacy, at the corner of Huntington Drive and Fletcher Avenue. Opening in 1910, it was known as the Taylor Drug Store. During a period in the 1920s, it was Beckley's Pharmacy, and in 1934, Benjamin Pool acquired the business and it became Pool's Pharmacy. The store served the southeast section of the city and advertised free delivery of drug items. During the mid-1960s, Robert Penland acquired Pool's and continued its operation until it closed around 1980.

The charming era of neighborhood drug stores came to an end when Pool's Pharmacy closed. Those early stores and their pharmacists were an important part of our lives and the city of South Pasadena for more than a century. 🌿



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Soda FOUNTAIN

(circa 1915)



A Bit of History

Fair Oaks Pharmacy & Soda Fountain has been South Pasadena's friendly corner drug store since 1915. When Michael and Meredith Miller purchased Fair Oaks in 1989, they became enchanted with the idea of restoring the pharmacy to its original turn-of-the-century style, complete with a soda fountain and lunch counter.

Their quest eventually led them to the circa 1900s McGee Pharmacy in Joplin, Missouri. There they located a complete set of pharmacy fixtures and an original soda fountain. This treasured find also included antique stained glass cabinetry, marble-topped counters, heavy chrome bar stools and original Hamilton Beach malt mixers. Pharmacy owner, Grace McGee, agreed to sell her heirloom fixtures to the Millers only after they promised to maintain them as a complete set and to use them in an actual pharmacy.

The Millers have added to this collection other authentic soda fountain and apothecary memorabilia which combine to create Fair Oaks Pharmacy and Soda Fountain's delightful vintage atmosphere. Whether it's a banana split, old fashioned milk shake, or frothy phosphate, the soda fountain specialties are sure to arouse the senses of the young-at-heart wishing to relive the "good old days."

For hungry travelers on Historic Route 66, lunch menu items such as the "Vintage Vegetarian" or the "Roadside Special" offer a chance to refuel and relax. We also feature fresh salads and gourmet coffee.

Fair Oaks Pharmacy and Soda Fountain also features an array of unique, one-of-a-kind gifts, greeting cards, toys and decorative accessories reflecting the era of the original store as well as various classic collections from vintage film and television eras. So browse, eat, enjoy and return.

One of the best stops on Route 66.

Open 7 day a week

Counter and outdoor seating available

Store Hours

Mon - Thurs 9 AM - 10 PM

Fri - Sat 9 AM - 11 PM

Sunday 11 AM - 9 PM

Lunch hours

Mon - Sun 11 AM - 5 PM

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